

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Academic Integrity Challenges and Institutional Policy Responses

Higher Education, Technology & Ethics

Difficulty	Intermediate – Advanced	Recommended Length	11,000 – 13,000 words
Keywords	AI, academic integrity, ChatGPT, university policy, plagiarism, higher education, generative AI	Academic Support	AssignProSolution.com

Introduction

The arrival of ChatGPT in late 2022 sent university assessment offices into crisis mode. Overnight, the tools available to students changed fundamentally — and the policies designed to ensure assessment integrity had not anticipated them. Two years on, universities are still developing their response, and the responses vary enormously. This dissertation examines what those policies look like in practice, whether they are coherent, and whether they are fair.

Background and Context

The initial institutional response to generative AI in UK higher education was largely prohibitionist — use of AI tools in assessed work was treated as equivalent to contract cheating. This position proved difficult to maintain for several reasons: AI detection tools are unreliable, the line between AI assistance and permitted tools like spellcheck or grammar checkers is unclear, and blanket bans arguably disadvantage students with lower digital literacy rather than deterring sophisticated use. A second wave of policy development has moved toward nuanced 'permitted use with disclosure' frameworks, but implementation has been inconsistent.

Key Research Questions

1. How do UK universities currently define and regulate the use of generative AI in assessed work?
2. Are existing AI integrity policies coherent and consistently applied across departments within the same institution?
3. How do academic staff understand and implement AI integrity policies in practice?
4. Are current policies fair — do they disadvantage particular student groups disproportionately?

Suggested Methodology

Document analysis of academic integrity policies from 20 UK universities (Russell Group and post-1992 institutions), coding for key policy dimensions: prohibition vs permission framework, disclosure requirements, detection mechanisms, and penalty structures. Semi-structured interviews with academic staff across two or three institutions. Optional student survey on awareness and compliance with current policies.

Key Theoretical Frameworks

Academic Integrity Framework — Bertram Gallant (2008)

Technology Acceptance Model — Davis (1989)

Fairness in Assessment — Stobart (2008)

Ethics of AI — Floridi et al. (2018)

Common Challenges and How to Address Them

This area is moving fast. Policy documents change, institutions revise positions, and new AI capabilities shift the landscape. Build a clear scope statement and a data collection cutoff date into the methodology. The dissertation should also be careful not to become a polemic about AI — the strongest pieces here are analytically neutral about AI itself and focused on the institutional and ethical dimensions of policy.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This is one of the most topical dissertation areas available in education studies right now, and the literature base is thin enough that a well-executed dissertation makes a genuine contribution. The key is maintaining analytical rigour in a space that generates strong opinions. The research question should be about institutions and policy, not about AI itself. If you want help developing a solid methodology for this topic, AssignProSolution.com has academic specialists who can help.

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